



# The Roadrunner

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Geth O. White, Editor

## CALENDAR

- Apr. 15  
7:30 P. M.  
MONTHLY MEET. Place, Centennial Museum, UTEP campus. New members are especially invited to come. The program will be a series of slides and movies by members. Jack Scott and Mary Moore, two expert photographers, will have some color shots of beautiful dark canyons, flowering buck-eye and mountain laurel of Sierra Viejas Mountains trip. Betty Roberts has a movie she prepared of the birds in her yard in San Antonio -- many of the same species we have here. A brief documentary, "The Private Life of a Kingfisher," will also be a part of the program.
- Apr. 20 TOS spring meeting at Beaumont with headquarters at the Ramada Hotel.
- Apr. 27 Field trip to Hueco Tanks. Meet at the Bordertown Drive In Theatre at 7:30 A. M. for a warmup or scouting trip for the Big Day count the next week.
- May 1 The Charlie Jensens are having a supper party for those who will take part in the Big Day Count. Their address is 5816 Vista Clara, the hour 7:00 P. M. Call Marcy Jensen at 584-7626 by April 28 if you can come. Come join the fun.
- May 4 Spring Count. The Big Day -- all day. If you didn't get a territory or meeting place assigned at the Wednesday meeting, call Charlie Jensen 584-7626 or Eddie Chew 532-6410. See article in newsletter for more details on Big Day Count.
- May 4-5 Garden Club Show. Audubon will have a space in the "Ecology Corner." Sally Wells outlined the space, lighting, etc. to Linda Jones, Helen Barto, Sue Santaella and Geth White on the 25th of April and plans are proceeding to have an exhibit of plants to use to attract birds to your garden, natural insect predators, simple bird bath and feeders. Hours will be 3:30 to 7:30 on Saturday, 1:00 to 5:30 on Sunday at the Civic Center. Plan to attend. Volunteers are needed to staff the space.
- May 11 Field trip to Aguierre Springs in the Organ Mountains. Meet at 7:00 A. M. at Coronado Shopping Center to car pool. We need to get up there early for the best birding.
- May 20  
7:30 P. M.  
MONTHLY MEET. Centennial Museum, UTEP campus. Speaker will be from the naturalist Staff, Carlsbad Caverns National Park. He will tell us of exciting new programs like exploring a wild cave at Carlsbad; wilderness plans, birds, animals and plants in this unique area so near to El Paso.
- May 25-27 Field trip to the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona. A long weekend if you have Monday off. Camp in the National Forest or stay at Cave Creek. Reservations far in advance are necessary. Excellent birding should produce the Coppery-tailed Trogon and many hummingbird species.

Last month's meeting was especially interesting. John Nowak is not only an experienced ecologist, but an excellent photographer. Some of his pictures of the wildlife at the Salton Sea were superb. He gave Horizon Land Company a nickel's worth of free advice. This casting of bread onto the salty waters of Horizon Lake turned into "bread" of a full time career after planned early retirement with John planning to preserve and protect a most valuable natural asset and Horizon Land Company furnishing the budget to implement the plans.

They will deal with some of the special problems of desert environment. Study areas for botanists, mammologists are planned as well as recreational plots for picnicking and sailing on the lake.

"Life of the Osprey" was a beautiful film from National Audubon Society. It detailed some of the problems birds of prey who are fisheaters have when the fish they eat are contaminated with DDT, resulting in thinning eggshells and reproductive failure.

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Proposed Field Trip to Casas Grandes has been cancelled originally set for April 27 has been cancelled. We are somewhat unsure of various conditions in the area and have not had much interest from members for that date. Perhaps we can do some advance exploration and have the trip in the fall.

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The weather for the field trip on March 24 to the Upper Valley bosque was a little nippy as we all climbed into Sarah Jane Dodd's van, but it later developed into a nice spring day. The first stop at the lake near the Girl Scout Camp produced, in addition to the usual residents, four species of swallows performing their aerial ballet on front stage, probably attracted by the clouds of insects we were scaring up. As we moved onto the drainage ditch we found a shy Belted Kingfisher straying just a little past our view. Common Gallinules and Long-billed Marsh Wrens let us have a glimpse, but managed to keep away from Bob Bleicher's camera lens. Green Heron and Great Blue Herons were also on the ditch. At the bosque Bertye Barnhart spotted a verdin cooperative enough to let most of us get a good look at him. Others on the trip were Marilyn Fankhauser, Mrs. Barnhart and Eddie Chew.

#### VALENTINE VALLEY

By Mary Moore

As the early sun crept over the crenelated walls of the red volcanic hills, we crawled from our sleeping bags, yawning, and hoping for coffee. An earlier riser, a rusty little canyon Wren chose a perch high on the ridge of a stone building to survey the motley group and serenade them with his lilting cascade of melody. With the help of the song, a hearty breakfast and a few scanty ablutions, we were finally ready for our day among the canyons.

We explored the deep ravine washed a millinnum by gentle rains and raging torrents, the jagged rocks now smooth and rounded but piled high in rough confusion. There were quiet pools, shady and cool, surrounded by niches holding curling fronds of fern and grasses dipping into the water. Above a broad-leaf yucca sported its creamy, waxy blossoms -- the young buds a bright magenta.

On either side of the stream bed stood towering walls, igneous columns cracked, broken and worn to various heights that gave a fanciful impression of giant stepping stones. Shining brilliantly through the canyon, the sun back-lighted the dainty green of spring leaves and rosy blush of blossoming Western Buckeye. Was the Buckeye buzzing or was that just the myriad of bees wallowing in its delicious pollen?

We strolled, we climbed; we sat in the somnolent warmth and talked; we added to our growing bird list; we focused on and snapped pictures of the rocks, the blossoms, the preening buzzards high on their eyrie, and of each other. We explored the heights despite the ubiquitous cat-claw's insistent "wait a bit." A pair of deer were startled high on a crest, each of us gazing curiously at each other. Finally we descended, albeit by a devious route -- there are many trails, also many directions to ponder and many precipices from which to peer longingly at the camp below. But who minds a frustrating trail, when at the end, you're sitting with the refreshing breeze blowing through the portales, a big succulent sandwich in one hand and a cool drink in the other? Pure contentment!

Mr. and Mrs. Miller, we had a wonderful time. Thank you.

Bird species list included: Mallard, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Shoveler, Ruddy Duck, Turkey Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Sparrow Hawk, Scaled Quail, American Coot, Western Sandpiper, American Avocet, Mourning Dove, White-winged Dove, Poorwill (calling at dusk) Lesser Nighthawk, White-throated Swift, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Broad-tailed Hummingbird (lots of these) Belted Kingfisher, Red-shafted Flicker, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Say's Phoebe, Violet-green Swallow, Barn and Cliff Swallows, White-necked Raven, Black-crested Titmouse, Verdin, Cactus Wren, Canyon Wren, Rock Wren, Mockingbird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Loggerhead Shrike, Nashville Warbler, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Western Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Boat-tailed Grackle, Pyrrhuloxia, House Finch, Lesser Goldfinch, Green-tailed Towhee, Rufous-sided Towhee, Brown Towhee, Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow. Waterfowl and shore birds were seen at reservoirs we stopped at in the lower valley enroute home. Sarah Jane Dodd also caught a fleeting glance of a ferret near one of the lakes as it crossed the road, quite an unusual animal to see in the wild. People who enjoyed the Miller's hospitality were: Al Gavit and his two boys, Clarence and Libby Shelfer, Mary Moore, Sarah Jane Dodds, Jack Scott, Geth and Ed White. Two pet javelinas paid us a lot of attention, nuzzling our ankles and communicating with a constant snuffling grunt, even climbing into laps to be petted.

BENEFIT AUCTION COMING UP IN JUNE. Let yourself go and get creative. Bring any handmade article to be offered to the highest bidder. Two years ago it was a huge success combined with a picnic in Mary Moore's cool, green garden at 4613 Yandell. Proceeds will be used to pursue our pet projects. Items can be as diverse as herb vinegar to homemade fudge, planters, terrariums, bird feeders, no limit except to your imagination. Bring your families and a picnic supper to share with the group.

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BIG DAY COUNTS are first, competitive and challenging. The point is to find the most birds in each possible habitat and to exploit it to its limit. The migration is on and there is greater opportunity to turn up rarities than at the Christmas count. We are not confined to the Christmas count circle and can include water habitats which had to be excluded because of that circumscribed circle. The important thing is to be lucky -- to hit a day when waves of migrants are passing through. A crystal ball would be helpful. The second most important thing is to have enough people in the field to cover all the habitats.

Our records in the last four years tell us that the period when the most species are present lies between April 30 and May 7, with allowances for weather, such as an extremely cold, wet winter vs. a dry, warm winter. It is difficult to

understand what brings a bird down in the long migratory flight. It is well known that birds fly a watercourse and we have the Rio Grande. Then there are the Franklin Mountains and the wind currents. Watered lawns with trees and shrubs, desert washes thick with plants, man-made lakes and reservoirs, sewage ponds, drainage ditches -- all are likely places to rest and feed.

Good territories to cover include: a sampling to be added to.

Water : Horizon Lake. Brush around lake good for land birds, especially warblers and sparrows.

Ft. Bliss Sewage Ponds. Enough cattails and marsh plants for rails, bitterns. Sparrows and warblers in brush.

Rio Grande River from Frontage Road, north and south on levees. Prime habitat for small migrants, especially around the old drainage ditches in this vicinity.

River not good because of heavy volume of water and lack of sandbars due to irrigation of valley. Hawks and larger water birds, gulls, etc. will follow watercourse.

Sunland Race Track Lake. Deep enough water for geese and ducks.

Cement Lake. Good for water fowl because of isolation. Brush and marshy growth deserve more study for birds.

Residential : Upper valley and lower valley, your own neighborhoods. Birders develop a feeling for what's new in their own backyards.

Mountain Canyons: Brushy canyons, especially with springs, are good habitats for some birds found only in such places, such as the black-chinned sparrow which breeds in the sotol-grasslands of upper canyons of Franklins.

Come to the Jensens and help in the planning of a super-Big Day.

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Ruby Allen, who is studying ornithology at the University of Arizona in Tucson, offers to bring back the new Field Guide to Mexican Birds by Peterson and Chalif, who lives in Tucson. Mr. Chalif allows the local Tucson Audubon Society to benefit from the profit from all books sold and will autograph your copy. Write to Ruby at 2801 N. Park Ave, #6, Tucson, Arizona 85719 and include check for \$3.95 if you would like her to bring a book to you the first of June.

#### NEIGHBORHOOD BIRD CONTEST.

Your editor proposes a contest to run for June, July and August wherein you keep a record of all the bird species you see in your neighborhood. Prize a trophy you get to keep until someone beats your record with tallies made each three month period. Neighborhood shall be defined as within your block, including the air above. If you happen to have an arroyo in your block, that's your good luck. It's surprising what turns up in a year's time in some neighborhoods and how different the neighborhood biomes can be. It's fair to put in feeders, watering places and to plant to attract birds, or to bell the neighbor's cat. With the gas shortage, it should be fun to see what you can turn up right around home. Will it be an east side or west side resident, the upper valley, the lower valley or Mountain Park who has the winner?

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